

CITY OF BELLEVUE
DOWNTOWN LIVABILITY
CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

January 15, 2014
6:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-108

MEMBERS PRESENT: Aaron Laing, Ernie Simas, co-chairs; Patrick Bannon, Michael Chaplin, Mark D'Amato, Hal Ferris, Gary Guenther, Brad Helland, Trudi Jackson, Loretta Lopez, Lee Maxwell, Erin Powell, Jan Stout

MEMBERS ABSENT: Ming Zhang

OTHERS PRESENT: Dan Stroh, Emil King, Patti Wilma, Department of Planning and Community Development; Liz Stead, Development Services; John Owen, Bob Bengford, Makers

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER, APPROVAL OF AGENDA, APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Co-chair Simas called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

2. INTRODUCTION TO WORKSHOP

Co-chair Simas said the purpose of the workshop was to look at all of the alternatives that have been discussed over the past several months, and to open the door to new ideas and alternatives that may be sparked by the conversations. He said the desired outcome would be a list of actionable items for the staff to use in moving forward with more detailed analysis and evaluation.

Strategic Planning Manager Emil King said the workshop was a real milestone for the project and represented a lot of hard work to date on the part of the Committee and the public. He noted that the packet materials included a number of draft ideas and said the goal was for the Committee to split into two groups to discuss the ideas, then to come together at the end of the night and provide direction to staff for moving forward. He asked the Committee members to keep in mind two key questions: 1) is the range of alternatives and strategies adequate for the analysis and evaluation phase?; and 2) is there anything missing that should be included ahead of the analysis and evaluation phase? He stressed that the direction to be provided tonight to staff does not constitute a final recommendation from the Committee; there is still a lot of detailed work that needs to happen, including a full discussion of the results of the analysis, before a final set of Committee recommendations can be formulated.

Mr. King said each group had a designated note taker and a person identified to report back key findings. He said the last part of the meeting would be spent in comparing notes, looking for similarities, identifying differences in need of being reconciled, and giving direction to the staff.

Following the workshop, staff and the consultant team will begin the work of evaluating the range of alternatives and strategies. That work will include distilling a set of evaluation criteria for the Committee to use in the coming months in formulating a final set of recommendations; the criteria will be based on the Council principles and existing Comprehensive Plan policy direction.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Bruce Nurse with Kemper Development Company urged the Committee to consider three issues that have a direct bearing on Downtown livability: 1) the installation of skybridges to separate pedestrians from vehicles; 2) the concept of capping intersections, also to separate pedestrians from vehicles while allowing them to cross streets without having to wait for the signal to change; and 3) the notion of a subsurface arterial accessible from NE 6th Street, running underneath the existing transit center connecting to Bellevue Way.

Mr. Jeff Freedman distributed to the Committee members information regarding a project that is currently permitted by the City and set to start construction soon. He said the 10-story building will be located in Downtown Bellevue. The idea of allowing an amenity space to be placed on the roof and have it be exempt from FAR (floor area ratio) calculations was discussed with the staff; the practice is common in some jurisdictions, including Seattle. Bellevue code includes a provision that allows additional height in exchange for rooftop visual enhancements, but tweaks to the code would allow for so much more. Rooftop areas take away from developable residential area and as such they do not generate tax revenues for the City. What has been permitted includes a frame that accomplishes a visual enhancement, but a code change is needed to be allowed to fill in the frame with space and better screening.

4. SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

The Advisory Committee divided into two small groups as follows (staff and consultants assisted with notetaking and facilitation):

Group 1: Aaron Laing, Patrick Bannon, Mark D'Amato, Loretta Lopez, Brad Helland, Jan Stout, Emil King (staff), Patti Wilma (staff), John Owen (Makers)

Group 2: Ernie Simas, Michael Chaplin, Hal Ferris, Gary Guenther, Trudi Jackson, Lee Maxwell, Erin Powell, Dan Stroh (staff), Liz Stead (staff), Bob Bengford (Makers)

Each group used the Alternatives Workbook as a guide to engage in a discussion of potential strategies and alternatives to move forward to the analysis phase. Topics included:

- ❖ Building Height and Form
- ❖ Vision for DT-OLB District
- ❖ Major Pedestrian Corridor
- ❖ Public Open Spaces
- ❖ Amenity Incentive System
- ❖ Design Guidelines
- ❖ Downtown Food Trucks
- ❖ Downtown Parking

5. REPORT OUT FROM SMALL GROUPS

Building Height and Form

Mr. D'Amato reported out for Group 1; Mr. Ferris for Group 2. With regard to building height and form, Mr. D'Amato said his group thought status quo provides a good baseline for comparison. He said the group concluded it would make sense to examine pushing building height upward, but wanted to see rationale and criteria established for allowing up to 600 feet or higher in the core area. The group agreed the Perimeter A and B zoning boundaries should be examined, though there was recognition of the fact that such a review could be controversial. The group agreed to examine residential and nonresidential height and FAR equalization, taking into account nonresidential floorplate needs. The group wished to revise common element D so that any modifications to height and form be explored to see if they could be accomplished through design guidelines in addition to the incentive system. An item E was added to the common elements to explore the possibility of transferring FAR across development zones.

Speaking for his group regarding the same topic, Mr. Ferris said they gravitated toward the third alternative. He said they concluded that where the second alternative is primarily focused on increasing heights in the Downtown core, the third option allows height increases in districts beyond just the Downtown core. The group concluded that in addition to height, increasing allowed FAR should also be evaluated. Increasing the development potential is a way to create a greater economic lift that could be translated into the incentive system. The group did not support the notion of equalizing the residential and nonresidential height and FAR. The group agreed there should be an exploration of potential revisions to floorplate and tower configurations provided architectural treatments shy away from large square buildings.

Vision for DT-OLB District

Mr. D'Amato said his group did not want to see the status quo retained as the vision for the DT-OLB district. The group felt that simply extending the DT-MU district to the entire DT-OLB district (as articulated in the second alternative) is not desirable and

concluded that extending the character of the adjacent districts makes far more sense. The group agreed to move the third alternative forward for analysis. The group desired to add a new common element to examine an open space/park investment that connects Downtown to the Wilburton area across I-405.

Mr. Ferris said his group also landed on the notion of extending the character of the adjacent districts to the DT-OLB district. The group concluded that in some portions of the DT-OLB district close to the freeway, heights greater than allowed in the DT-MU district could be easily accommodated because of the topography. The group supported all three of the potential common elements. The group viewed the DT-OLB as having the greatest potential for change in the allowed height, density and FAR, which would result in leveraging the amenity system. The southern two-thirds of the DT-OLB district has the greatest access to transit and could have different parking ratios to reflect that fact. The group also felt the City should not lose sight of the long-term potential for tying the DT-OLB to the area to the east of I-405 where there is a lot of underutilized land.

Major Pedestrian Corridor

Mr. D'Amato reported that with regard to the major Pedestrian Corridor his group concluded that both the Land Use Code measures and other City measures should be analyzed. One of the concerns voiced focused on not wanting the Corridor to look piecemeal, thus a City-led initiative should be implemented that will bring the Corridor online as envisioned. That would also free the City from having to wait for adjacent development. Rather than imposing design guidelines on adjacent property owners, the City should allow for payments in-lieu from which the City could draw to complete the grand scheme. Exploring such creative funding options would enable the City to develop the entire Pedestrian Corridor.

Mr. Ferris said his group took a different tack and concluded that the land use mechanism should be enhanced to see the Pedestrian Corridor developed, but also concluded that it does not rise to the level of importance that would have the City jumping in to complete the grand design for the Corridor. The group did indicate that ultimately the Pedestrian Corridor should be the place to be, but because of its narrowness it will never be fully defensible from a safety standpoint.

Public Open Space

On the topic of public open space, Mr. D'Amato said his group agreed with the range of strategies for evaluation. The group felt there should be a study regarding putting a lid over I-405, and that the City should think about creating a fund to acquire more public open space.

Mr. Ferris said his group also supported the notion of lidding I-405. The group also concurred with the range of strategies for evaluation. The group highlighted the importance of improving the connectivity and visibility between the open spaces but concluded that incentives alone will not be enough and the City will need to get involved in realizing the vision for public open spaces. Some properties may become available as a

result of light rail coming through the Downtown. Wayfinding and signage is important in differentiating between what is public space and what is not. Public open spaces that are only accessible through private property do not feel like public spaces and should not be incentivized; public spaces should feel like public spaces. Landscaping and trees should be included to soften the urban environment.

Amenity Incentive System

Mr. D'Amato said his group did not add to or take away from the full list of potential amenities. The group voiced support for a shorter and more focused list. Ultimately, some of the items currently shown as amenities should be made development requirements. Bonus rates for FAR should be recalibrated and simplified, and the system should be periodically updated in the future.

Mr. Ferris said his group concluded the status quo should not be carried forward. The group agreed that a shorter and more focused amenity list should be developed, and that many of the items on the current list should be required. However, the group felt that implementation of the incentives could vary by district within Downtown. A mechanism for a fee in-lieu system should be developed. The key to the incentive system will depend on doing the math relative to what the City will gain in return for the incentives offered. There should be a requirement for an automatic periodic review of the amenity system that does not require Council approval to launch.

Design Guidelines

With regard to the design guidelines, Mr. D'Amato reported that his group concurred with the proposed range of strategies. The members looked at the layout of street enhancements and chose to highlight the need to extend the enhancements along the full length of Main Street, tying the water in with the transit on Main Street. The group also underscored the need to regularly review the design guidelines.

Mr. Ferris said his group did not get into specific street designs but did recognize that the Great Streets study has never been adopted or implemented. Appropriate portions of that study need to be implemented. The group concluded that the street modifications that came out of that study are particularly important. There was discussion about the fact that at times the City has been too prescriptive relative to materials that can and cannot be used, the result of which has been a homogenous and sterile look. He said his group agreed that a regular schedule should be established for assessing and updating the design guidelines.

Downtown Food Trucks

Mr. D'Amato said his group came down on the side of allowing food trucks to continue throughout Downtown while developing better criteria regarding their operations.

Mr. Ferris said his group had a good discussion about food trucks and also felt they should be allowed. He noted, however, that his group thought the locational criteria could

be overly restrictive. The thinking was that decisions regarding where they can be allowed to locate should be planned and purposeful, an approach that could even allow them to locate in City right-of-way with the proper permits. There was also support for developing requirements to address notification and keeping pedestrian paths clear.

Downtown Parking

Mr. D'Amato said in discussing the issue of Downtown parking his group concluded that the status quo should be considered as an option. The group expressed concern about reducing parking minimums (in the second alternative). Any reduction in the minimum parking requirements should be accomplished through a site-specific parking study. The group discussed the fact that accessible parking requirements have not been updated for some time and should be reviewed. If accessible parking is created below-grade, there should be strict guidelines for locating the spaces near elevators. The group felt strongly that the City should consider a public parking garage, possibly more than one. Old Bellevue in particular needs a public parking garage to help facilitate bringing people into that area.

Mr. Ferris said his group supported the second alternative to explore reducing minimum parking requirements. He noted that the alternative would not reduce the maximum parking ratios so a developer could still elect to build to the maximum limits. The City's long-term traffic plan requires that there be a 50 percent mode split so the roads are constructed to accommodate that goal. Currently the demand for parking reflects a 70 percent mode split, so if behavior is not changed over time there will be problems in accommodating everyone. There was agreement that the parking usage should be measured periodically to get a handle on the trends. The group also concluded that the third alternative, departing from the minimum requirements via a parking study, should be kept in play.

6. ADDITIONAL PUBLIC COMMENT - None

7. DIRECTION FROM COMMITTEE ON STRATEGIES AND ALTERNATIVES
TO MOVE FORWARD TO ANALYSIS PHASE

Following the report out, there was agreement that adequate direction was provided by the Small Group exercise for staff to move forward with analysis and evaluation. A summary of Committee direction would be included in the February meeting packet.

8. ADJOURN

Co-chair Simas adjourned the meeting at 10:23 p.m.